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Review of *Subordinate Subjects: Gender, the Political Nation, and Literary Form in England, 1588-1688* By Mihoko Suzuki

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Subordinate Subjects: Gender, the Political Nation, and Literary Form in England, 1588–1688
By Mihoko Suzuki
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Reviewer: Carole Levin

Mihoko Suzuki carefully puts together class and gender in her study, *Subordinate Subjects: Gender, the Political Nation, and Literary Form in England, 1588–1688*, by showing the similarities and linkages as well as the differences between apprentices and women in their desire to be part of the political nation in early modern England. At the time their attempts to gain power and autonomy were ultimately unsuccessful but they did have important ramifications later. Historians and political theorists have traditionally seen the French revolution as the beginning of the ideal of equality, what Suzuki calls "the political imaginary of equality" (2). Yet more than a century before 1789, English women and apprentices gave expression to the value of the rights of all citizens. The careful way Suzuki demonstrates the interconnections of early modern English class and gender provides the reader with an important lesson on the necessity of not separating gender from other considerations.

Over the course of the hundred years under consideration, Suzuki describes the ways apprentices and women developed as political agents, eventually refusing to accept subordinate status either in the family or the larger political social structure. Though some scholars see the clash between Parliament and monarchy as a political conflict rather than revolutionary change, Suzuki disagrees, and indeed refers to it not as the English civil war but the "English Revolution." After the 1650s, England would never be the same. Suzuki argues that even with the restoration of Charles II and the Stuart monarchy, the political desires of women and apprentices were not dissipated but rather evolved in different ways.

Suzuki begins her study in 1588, the year of the Spanish Armada, one of the most challenging events for England's sixteenth-century queen, Elizabeth I. She describes it as the beginning of the "long seventeenth century," but however one puts Elizabeth chronologi-

cally she certainly belongs in the discussion of rising political consciousness. Even if the queen was not herself specifically interested in bringing women into the political nation, Elizabeth was a valuable model and precedent for women in the generations after.

Suzuki's discussion of Renaissance drama and audience response to it is especially enlightening. For example, she shows how in Elizabethan domestic drama such as *Arden of Feversham* and *A Warning for Fair Women*, there are not only unhappy wives but men of subaltern status eager to rebel against their subordinate position within the social order. Particularly thoughtful is her analysis of *Measure for Measure*, a play she finds poised between comedy and tragedy. In the play Shakespeare explored what could happen when an ordinary woman finds it necessary to intervene politically; uniquely for the time, Shakespeare does not render Isabella monstrous or punish her for seeking a public role. Powerfully, in the final act, Isabella demands "Justice, Justice, Justice!" However, while Isabella is rhetorically powerful throughout the play, Shakespeare seems deliberately not to provide her with an answer to the Duke's proposal at the end, suggesting perhaps that while the Duke wants to domesticate her as wife and subject, her silence is demonstrating her resistance.

Suzuki is equally comfortable discussing the poetry of Aemilia Lanyer and such prose texts as the pamphlet wars over women's capabilities. Her thorough discussion of Rachel Speght is especially interesting when she demonstrates how Speght drew on the earlier work of Christine de Pizan. She is also valuable in her discussion of the role of apprentices during the English Revolution, showing their activity in rioting and petitioning in 1641 and 1647. Apprentices were strongly critical of Parliament in 1649, throwing their support to the Levelers. A decade later, apprentices were calling for a "free parliament," opposing the tyrannical rule of the army.

Suzuki demonstrates her far-reaching scholarship by her use of literary, popular, and political texts for which she provides significant cultural contexts. Her wide-ranging scholarship asks important questions, and also provides answers to large-scale social, political, and cultural concerns. This is not an easy book to read but the work is more than repaid by the insights Suzuki provides. Scholars interested in literature and drama, in politics, in gender and class, and in cultural development will all find much of value in this book.